

MERCY and JUDGMENT *displayed in the*  
*Effects of a Gospel Ministry.*

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A

S E R M O N

FROM

ISAIAH VIII. 16.

Preached at the Opening of the ASSOCIATE SYNOD at Edinburgh, April  
 22d, 1766.

By the Rev. Mr. WILLIAM MONCRIEFF,  
 Minister of the Gospel in *Alloa*.

2 COR. ii. 15. *For we are unto God a sweet savour of*  
*Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that*  
*perish.*

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## MERCY and JUDGMENT, &amp;c.

## A SERMON,

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ISAIAH viii. 16. *Bind up the testimony, seal the law among my disciples.*

WHILE judgments were impending upon the Jews, the Lord warns the prophet Isaiah, and by him his people, against the fear of man which causeth a snare, ver. 12. of this chapter; and proposes to them the fear of God, as an antidote against this sinful fear of man, ver. 13. *Sanctify the Lord of Hosts himself, and let him be your fear, and let him be your dread.* The unspeakable advantage that accrues to the fearers of his name, is proposed as a motive to inforce the exhortation, ver. 14. *and he shall be for a sanctuary;* a place of refuge and defence, where his people shall be safe in the greatest dangers. But withal, the more to inforce this duty, the dreadful issue of unbelief in not fearing God, and not taking up with him as their sanctuary, is set before them in a clear light in the following part of ver. 14. and in ver. 15. for, through their unbelief, he would prove *for a stone of stumbling, and for a rock of offence, for a gin and for a snare, so that many among them shall stumble, and fall, and be broken, and be snared, and be taken.* The apostle Peter, 1 Ep. ii. 8. cites this scripture, and applies it to Christ; and so teaches us, that

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the Lord Christ is that Jehovah, the Lord of Hosts, who is spoken of here, whom we are to sanctify, to make our fear, and our dread; who will be for a sanctuary to all that believe in him: but occasionally, through mens unbelief and disobedience,---a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence, to all rejecters of him; so as they fall more dreadfully, than if Christ and the the gospel had never been brought near to them. Such as fall on this stone must undoubtedly be broken; and as to all such as are not recovered from their fall, this stone will fall upon them and grind them to powder.

Life and death being thus set before them, the blessing and the curse; then comes in our text, delivered in the form of a command to the prophet; *Bind up the testimony, seal the law among my disciples.* Various opinions have been embraced, as to the meaning of these words; but that we may, in a dependence upon the Spirit of Truth, find out his meaning in this passage, let us take some particular view thereof. We may notice,

1st, The speaker here, and that is the LORD OF HOSTS, the Lord Christ, as appears from the preceding context expressly applied to him in the New Testament; and also what is said, ver. 18. *Behold, I and the children which God hath given me*, is applied to Christ, Heb. ii. 13. It was he that by his Spirit spake to the prophets, and it was from him they had their commission.

2dly, To whom this infinite person speaks; to the prophet *Isaiab* immediately: but as what was written aforetime was written for our learning; we may consider it as not only spoken to him, but also to the Ministers and Servants of Christ in after-times in like circumstances.

3dly, What he speaks about; the *testimony* and the *law*. These words seem to point out one and the same thing; and may be understood, not only as pointing



ing out what God revealed to this prophet concerning his way with this people, the coming of the Messiah, and setting up his kingdom in the world ; nor only of the Old Testament, called the *Law and the Testimony*, ver. 20. as then the New Testament dispensation had not taken place : for though these may be more immediately understood, yet we conceive, as the words have a respect to after-times as well as the days of this prophet, or the days of the Old Testament church ; that they may be understood of the whole of the doctrine of Christ, as handed down to us in the whole Bible, in the Old and New Testament. The word of God in the scriptures of truth is God's *testimony* to us concerning his mind and will ; and such a testimony as has a binding power upon us, obliging us to faith and obedience ; and so it is both a *testimony* and a *law*. And especially they may be understood of the gospel of the grace of God, which is called a *testimony*, John iii. 32, 33 : And sometimes (though when law and gospel are strictly taken they are opposed) it is called a *law*, as Isaiah ii. 3. *Out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.*

4thly, There is here a commission given, or a command delivered to the prophet, of *binding up* this testimony and *sealing* this law. It must be inquired, what may be intended by this *binding up* and *sealing*. *Binding up* sometimes denotes the *safety* of a thing, as 1 Sam. xxv. 29. Abigail says to David, *The soul of my lord shall be bound in the bundle of life with the Lord thy God ;* it should thus be safe. Again, *binding up* may denote a thing's being *hid* and *secreted* ; and some think this is so expressed in allusion to merchants, who, after they have exposed their goods, bind them up and put them out of sight when the market is over.

—*Sealing* sometimes denotes a thing being made sure, Matth. xxvii. 66. *They made the sepulchre sure, sealing the stone :* and when applied to writs, it points out their

their being *established and confirmed*; thus Ahasuerus's decrees we read of in Esther were *sealed with the King's ring*. Sealing also sometimes holds forth a thing being *hid*; thus the book (Rev. v.) in the right hand of him that sat on the throne, was *sealed with seven seals*; it is usual among men, when they have wrote, to seal their letters, that what is contained in them may be kept hid till the seal be opened. Finally, *sealing*, when applied to the word of God, sometimes signifies the gracious and abiding *impression* the word makes upon those whom the Lord deals savingly with, through the operation of the divine Spirit accompanying the ministry thereof, Job xxxiii. 16. *Then openeth he the ears of men, and sealeth their instruction*: and so believers are said to be sealed, by the efficiency of the Spirit and instrumentality of the word, 2 Cor. i. 22. *who hath also sealed us*. Though we do not exclude from the meaning of the text, the testimony and law its being confirmed and made sure, having instamped upon it the seal of divine authority, on account of which it is to be believed and obeyed; and its being kept safe to be transmitted pure from generation to generation, for it is written for the generations to come: yet we conceive that God's hiding the testimony and law from some, and revealing and powerfully applying it to others, are the things chiefly intended here. And either both these may be pointed out in both expressions in the text, *Bind up the testimony* from the rejecters of the Lord's message,—but bind it up, hide it, or lay it up as a treasure among my disciples, let it be hid in their hearts; *seal the law* from unbelievers, but seal it upon and among my disciples: Or rather, the dispensation of righteous judgment may be held forth in the first clause, *bind up the testimony*; and the gracious dispensation in the second, *seal the law among my disciples*.

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But it may be proper to observe here, that these words neither carry in them, on the one hand, that the good fruit and efficacy of the labours of Christ's servants depend upon them, they are only the instruments in the Lord's hand of this sealing work among disciples; nor on the other hand, that this binding up and hiding of the testimony is the proper end of their ministry, or an issue that they are to desire. For they are sent to open mens eyes, and turn them from darkness to light; and are earnestly to wish for the salvation of their hearers: but through mens unbelief and obstinacy, the word that is appointed for their illumination and salvation may prove the occasion of blinding and hardening them; and the Lord may be provoked to give this awful commission, *Bind up the testimony,—make the heart of this people fat, and their ears heavy, and shut their eyes, &c.* It is then as if the Lord had said to the prophet,—Go on in the faithful discharge of thy office, declaring the testimony and the law: and the effect shall be, that, as to unbelievers and rejecters of thy message, the testimony shall be bound up and hid from them; but as to my people, the law shall be sealed among them, to their spiritual benefit and everlasting salvation; both which shall redound to my glory.

5thly, The character of them among whom the law is sealed; *my disciples*, my scholars, those that learn of me; they shall profit by these doctrines, and by that ministry by which others are more and more blinded and hardened: and this implies the character of these, on the other hand, from whom the testimony is bound up; they are such as will not come to Christ's school, nor submit to his instructions.

This scripture, as thus explained, was verified as to the ministry of the prophets of old, Isaiah vi. 9, 10. It had a special accomplishment, in the effects of Christ's personal ministry on earth, as appears from Isaiah xi. 4. and John ix. 39. This was also the case, as to ministry  
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of his apostles, 2 Cor. ii. 15, 16. But what was written aforetime was written for our learning : and both scripture and experience shew, that this is also the case with the ministry of Christ's servants since the canon of the scripture was compleated. We take the scope of the text to be to this purpose, *viz.*

That while the ministers of Christ do, through divine assistance, faithfully discharge their trust, in declaring his testimony and his law in Zion ; the Lord sovereignly makes their ministrations to turn out to a *binding up the testimony* from many in a way of righteous judgment, and to a *sealing the law* upon and among others in a way of grace and mercy : *Bind up the testimony, seal the law among my disciples.*

As this subject so nearly concerns us who are ministers, as well as the people ; it may not be improper to dwell a little upon it on this occasion : by taking a more particular view, 1st, Of this *testimony* and *law* which the ministers of Christ are to declare in Zion, and observe some things as to their declaring of the same ; 2dly, Of this awful but righteous dispensation, of *binding up* the testimony, even by their ministrations ; 3dly, Of this gracious dispensation, of *sealing* the law among Christ's disciples, by the same ministry ; and 4thly, Subjoining some improvement of what may be offered : All as the Lord may be pleased to direct and assist. We return then,

I. To take a view of this *testimony* and *law* which Christ's ministers are to declare in Zion, and to say something as to their declaring of the same.

1st, This *testimony* and *law* which the ministers of Christ are to declare in Zion, contains all things that God has seen meet to reveal concerning himself and his will, and that are necessary for us to know and practise.

tise.—We cannot propose at present, to point out even all the great lines of the volume of God's book. He therein reveals, not only that he is, but what he is in his nature and perfections; and that in the one Godhead there are three distinct persons,—Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, 1 John v. 7. He therein reveals his eternal purposes, as far as he has seen meet to make them known; particularly as to the election of some of his fallen creatures to everlasting life, and the reprobation of others. He plainly makes known man's primitive integrity, being created after the image of God; and that a proper covenant was made with Adam in his upright state, as a public person and federal head to his posterity; wherein life was promised to him and his seed upon condition of his obedience, and death threatened in case of disobedience, Gen. ii. 16, 17. Rom. v. 12. The cavils of corrupt men against this doctrine are very unreasonable, if it be considered, that Adam was every way capable to fulfil the condition proposed; that his own interest was as much at the stake as that of his posterity, and so their concerns as safe in his hand, who was their common parent, as they could have been in their own; and that if he had stood till his probation had been finished, his posterity were to reap unspeakable advantage, and would no doubt have all admired this plan of divine wisdom: But what is sufficient for our believing this doctrine, whoever oppose it, is, that it is revealed in this testimony and law. He therein makes known, man's fall by the breach of this covenant, Gen. iii. 6. Rom. v. 12. and his utter inability to recover himself out of this state of sin and misery into which he is fallen; as he can neither fulfil the law nor satisfy the justice of God. He therein reveals the mystery of redemption by our Lord Jesus Christ. He makes known that eternal transaction, that council of peace, which was between them both; that covenant of grace, which is ordered

in all things and sure. He reveals the undertaking of the eternal Son of God in that council of peace, in the room of an elect world as their surety, Psalm xl. 6. Prov. viii. 23, 24. the mysterious constitution of his person as *Immanuel*, God-man; for as he was God by nature, God from eternity, he voluntarily became man, and so is God and man in two distinct natures and one person: his investiture with all saving offices, as the Prophet, Priest and King of his church: his bringing in everlasting righteousness, by a true and proper satisfaction in his obedience and sufferings, as substitute in the law-room and stead of an elect world. He reveals the mystery of the application of this redemption, by the Spirit; in the effectual calling, justification, sanctification, and glorification of such as were ordained to eternal life: which application of redemption is begun and carried on by the means of the gospel, wherein Christ is freely gifted and offered to all without exception; as the appointed mean of gathering in those whom he hath chosen.—Therein he makes known the nature and constitution of his church upon earth; commanding his ministers to shew the house to the house of Israel, that they may measure the pattern. He makes known what are the doctrines to be believed; the ordinances of worship to be observed, to which nothing is to be added, and from which nothing is to be taken away,—God's servant having dealt prudently in the institution of these ordinances: And also he points out therein the government appointed in his house; which is not left ambulatory, else Christ were not so faithful as a son as Moses was as a servant, and the New Testament church were at no small loss by Christ's coming: And the government of the church must not be looked upon as a matter of little consequence; it is as necessary as a wall to a city, or a hedge to a vineyard. Therein he reveals and makes known the duties to be practised by church-members;

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comprehended in love to God thro' Christ, and love to one another. And so this law and testimony is a most perfect rule, yea the only rule of faith and manners; and is every way worthy of its great Author, the supreme Lord and Lawgiver.

2dly, This testimony and law is divine; it is the testimony of God, and the law of God, Psalm lxxviii. 5. He attests the truth of all that is therein revealed; *for there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost, and these three are one:* and it is his authority which is interposed in this law, for the Lord is our Lawgiver. There is a *Thus saith the Lord*, as it were, prefixed to every revelation of divine truth, and every precept of duty. So it has the stamp of divine authority upon it, of the authority of the God of heaven. Therefore,

3dly, This testimony and law demands our faith and obedience. A testimony is to be credited; and if we receive the testimony of men, the testimony of God is greater. This testimony is to be believed, merely upon the authority of him who bears testimony; and he that thus receives his testimony, hath set to his seal that God is true. This testimony is not of such a nature, that men may believe it or not as they please; divine authority is therein interposed which requires our assent, and he that believeth not God hath made him a liar. And a law is to be obeyed, because of the authority of the lawgiver: so is this law, because of the authority of the one Lawgiver who is able to save and to destroy; who is the alone Lord of the conscience, and has power to bind it. To strike out against any thing he enjoins, is rebellion against the Majesty of heaven; and surely *rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry*, 1 Sam. xv. 23.

4thly, This testimony and law is the only criterion by which we are to try either doctrines or practices: It is the unerring rule, the touchstone, Isaiah viii. 20. *To the*

*the law and to the testimony : if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.* We are not implicitly to believe what men say, nor approve what they do, however great their characters be. The Bereans are commended as more noble than those in Thessalonica, because they brought even the doctrine of the Apostles to the touchstone of the word to be tried, Acts xvii. 11. ; and *John* warns to try the spirits, whether they be of God. And while we judge by the word, in a dependence upon the Spirit, we cannot mistake ; for it is more sure than a voice from heaven, 2 Pet. i. 19.

5thly, The Lord will have this testimony and law promulgated and declared by gospel-ministers in the church. The church is the pillar and ground of the truth. Not that the scripture derives its authority from the church : but it is as a pillar on which truth is as it were inscribed, for its preservation and promulgation, in allusion to the use of pillars of old ; and as the basis or seat of truth, as in the church truth is to be found in its proper seat or place. And ministers are as heralds appointed to publish this testimony and law in Zion : *I have set watchmen upon thy walls, O Jerusalem, which shall never hold their peace, Isaiah lxii. 6. I have made thee a watchman unto the house of Israel : therefore hear the word at my mouth, and give them warning from me, Ezek. iii. 17. Son of man shew the house to the house of Israel, that they may be ashamed of their iniquities, and let them measure the pattern. And if they be ashamed of all that they have done, shew them the form of the house, and the fashion thereof, and the goings out thereof, and the comings in thereof, and all the forms thereof, and all the ordinances thereof, and all the forms thereof, and all the laws thereof : and write it in their sight, that they may keep the whole form thereof, and all the ordinances thereof, and do them, Ezek. xliii. 19, 11. Mat. xxvii. 19, 29.*

*Go teach all nations ;—teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you : and lo, I am with you always even to the end of the world. Amen.* And they are faithfully and impartially to discharge this trust, without regarding mens feud or favour ; that they may have it to say, with the apostle of the Gentiles, *we are pure from the blood of all men, for we have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God.*

6thly, This testimony and law, while faithfully published and declared in the church, will not fail of an effect to the glory of God. The word that goes out of his mouth is as the rain that cometh down and the snow from heaven, which returneth not thither, but accomplisheth its end. It shall not return to him void ; it will either tend to mens salvation or their greater condemnation, in both which God shall be glorified. But this leads us,

II. To consider this awful but righteous dispensation of binding up the testimony, and that even as the effect of a gospel ministry. And here it may be proper to observe,

1st, That the testimony and law is hid from men, through their natural blindness, ignorance and unbelief ; and through the artifice of Satan, the god of this world, who blinds the minds of them that believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ should shine into them. And this way it is hid from all men, considered as to their natural state ; for *the natural man receiveth not the things of the spirit of God, they are foolishness to him, neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.* And this natural blindness and ignorance is culpable, is our fault ; because man brought it on himself, by his voluntary departure from God.

2dly, As there is a natural, so a contracted blindness, as to the great things contained in God's testimony and law, whereby they come to be further hid, and the  
testimony



testimony bound up; as well as there is a contracted hardness added to the natural, Zech. vii. 12. *They made their hearts as an adamant-stone*: We read of this contracted blindness, Mat. xiii. 15. Acts xxviii. 27. *For this peoples heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed, lest at any time they should see with their eyes.* Men do actively blind themselves, when they bar out the light, and will not submit to the truth; because it may cross their prevailing inclination, and what to them seems to be their interest.

The men who sent Jeremiah to enquire of the Lord for them, professed to be lying open to light, and to be ready to be instructed, Jer. xlii. 1.---7. but we see, chap. xliii. 1.---8. when they heard the Lord's message, they barred out the light and took their own way; and is not this the case with too many still? Also when men, through unaccountable carelessness and negligence, slight the means of the Lord's appointment for attaining acquaintance with these things; they are blinding themselves, and have an active hand in binding up the testimony.

3dly, There is a judicial blinding of men, and hiding of these things from them; even a binding up the testimony by God himself, in a way of righteous judgment. Thus as the blinding of men is attributed to themselves, as we have seen, so it is to God, John xii. 38. 39. 40. *He hath blinded their eyes, and hardened their hearts, that they should not see with their eyes, &c.* Isa. xxix. 10. 11, *The Lord hath poured out upon you the spirit of deep sleep, and hath closed your eyes. And the vision of all is become to you as the words of a book that is sealed.* But mens hand, in blinding themselves, is most sinful; God's hand, in judicially blinding them, is most just and holy: for, as coming from God, it has the notion of a just punishment; and he is of purer eyes than that he can behold iniquity or look upon sin, far less can he approve it or be the author of it. God judicially blinds men  
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and binds up the testimony, not by infusing into their minds any darkness or mistaken notions of divine things; but by withholding that supernatural illumination which is necessary to the saving uptaking of these things, and which he is not bound to give to any,—being a debtor to none, except in so far as he has been graciously pleased to oblige himself by free promise; and by giving them up in a way of righteous judgment to their own ignorance, blindness and hardness of heart, as a just punishment for their sins, particularly for their abuse of the means of knowledge: Thus he gave up the Gentiles, for their abusing what notices of God they had from the light of nature, Rom. i.; and thus were the Jews given up in Christ's day, and continue under that judgment to this day, Isa. vi. compared with John. xiii. 39. 40. and alas! is not this the case with multitudes in these last days? But this judicial binding up the testimony may be considered as it respects, 1. wicked men and reprobates: from whom God totally hides these things, as to any saving knowledge of them, thus Mat. xi. 25. He is said to *hide these things from the wise and prudent, and to reveal them unto babes.* 2. The Lord's own people, those who have the root of the matter in them;—the Lord, in a way of contending with them for their transgressions, and especially for not improving and following light when he gives it, but giving up themselves to a detestable neutrality in his cause,—may be provoked to bind up the testimony from them, as to what is the present truth and duty of the day; and to leave them to wander sadly in the darkness of error, and to mistake their way. Aaron, the saint of God, made a calf: and the apostle supposes, that such as hold the foundation may build thereupon wood, hay and stubble,—which in the issue shall be burnt, and the man suffer loss; yet he himself be saved, but so as by fire, 1 Cor. iii. 12. 15. Is not this sadly the case at this day: when many who, we have ground to think, belong to the Lord,  
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are so bewildered; embracing Latitudinarian tenets, to the subversion of any testimony for the cause of Christ,—and signalizing themselves in opposition to a covenanted work of reformation, justly looked upon in former days as the glory of these lands?

4thly, This judicial blinding of men and binding up the testimony, is, as to many, the effect of the ministry of Christ's servants. This may seem strange; while the proper end of sending ministers to publish this testimony and law, is the bringing men to the knowledge thereof to their salvation: But, however strange, it is true. Many a precious soul splits upon the Rock of salvation. As the same sun that makes flowers more fragrant, makes the dunghill more noisom; the same heat that melts wax, hardens clay: so the same Jesus *is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel*, Luke ii. 34. The same word of reconciliation, that to some is *the savour of life unto life*, is to others *the savour of death unto death*, 2 Cor. ii. 16. The words of Christ's mouth, that prove quickening to some, prove killing to others, Isa. xi. 4. Hos. vi. 5. and ministers may be sent with a gospel dispensation among a people, the proper tendency of which is to open their eyes,—and yet have it in commission from the Lord, to *shut their eyes, and their ears, and to harden their hearts, lest they see with their eyes, &c.* Isa. vi. 9, 10.; where what we have seen ascribed to people themselves as their heinous sin, and to God as a just and righteous judgment,—is ascribed to the ministry of the prophet, as being some way instrumental in bringing about this judgment from the hand of God. But some may be saying, How can these things be? We answer, This is not the proper end and design of the ministry of the word,—but to turn men from darkness to light, from the power of Satan unto God; yet thro' mens corruption, it comes to have this effect, and to be the occasion of their being blinded and hardened, Isa. xxviii. 13. *The word of the Lord*



*Lord was unto them, precept upon precept—that they might go and fall backward, and be broken, and snared, and taken.* Christ himself says, John ix. 39. *For judgment I am come into this world, that they which see not might see, and that they which see might be made blind;* that those who think they see and excel others, may, through the just judgment of God, be so dazzled with the splendor of the light as to become blind. While mens corruptions are not subdued by the grace of God through the means of the word, they are more irritated and enraged; and so they rebel against the light, and thus come to be more awfully blinded and hardened, and in the issue to receive a greater damnation; so that they fall backward, are broken, snared and taken,—and the word of Christ proves to them a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence. Such an issue of a gospel-ministry is very awful, and what, as we observed before, ministers are not to wish for, nor take pleasure in; seeing God takes not pleasure in the death of sinners. But they are, after Christ's example, to adore divine sovereignty, Mat. xi. 25, 26. and to rejoice that, in all things, God shall be glorified. But we have dwelt long enough on this melancholy part of our subject; let us now turn our eyes to the light side of the cloud, and

III. Consider the merciful dispensation, in this gracious effect of a gospel-ministry, *the sealing the law among Christ's disciples.* Here we may observe these things,

1st, The law may be said to be sealed among Christ's disciples, when they are brought, through the Spirit's operation, to know and believe it; to a certain persuasion of the truth of what is contained in God's word, so as to embrace and close with the truth. Tho' many things in it may be dark to them, yet they cannot but believe all that God says, upon the footing of his own testimony; and so they echo back to the law

published from mount Zion, *These are the true sayings of God*, --and as to every article of divine truth, *This is a faithful saying*. This is to *set to the seal that God is true*, John iii. 33. God's law is indeed most firm truth; and all that is contained in it is of the most undoubted certainty, whether we believe it or not, as leaving the seal of God's authority stamped upon it: but it is when men are brought, disciple-like, to this believing persuasion of the truth, that it is sealed among them; as it is this sealing that is here spoken of, *Seal the law among my disciples*.

2dly, The law may be said to be sealed among his disciples,---when the law, carried home with power upon their hearts, makes a deep, abiding and transforming impression upon them. This will always be the case, where the forementioned believing persuasion of the truth is wrought in the soul by the Holy Ghost. This is to *put his laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts*; so as they are *the epistle of Christ, written, not with ink, but with the spirit of the living God*;---not in tables of stone, but in *fleshy tables of the heart*, Heb. viii. 10. 2 Cor. iii. 3. and here we may more particularly notice,

1. A seal makes a deep and abiding impression upon the wax; so this is a thorough work upon the heart and soul, that cannot be defaced again, or erased by all the malice of hell and earth. The word, in respect of its abiding impression, is like a nail fastened in a sure place by the Master of assemblies.

2. The seal stamps upon the wax the very image of itself, so as there is an exact resemblance between the seal and the impression made by it: So this sealing of the law stamps upon the soul the very image of God, a transcript of which we have in his word,---so as the new man in the disciples of Christ is renewed after the image of him that created him; and the law in the heart,

heart, and the law in the word, answer to one another, as the seal and the impression made by it.

3. The seal distinguisheth the thing sealed from other things: So the disciples of Christ, upon whom the law is sealed, are by this sealing distinguished from all others, from the most refined hypocrites. *My sheep*, says the great Shepherd, *hear my voice, and I know them*; as being marked and distinguished by my word and spirit. There is indeed a counterfeit of God's grace,—there is a feigned faith, love and repentance; but they are quite different from the saving graces of the spirit of God. The difference is not gradual, but specific; they are things of a quite different nature and kind.

4. Sealing sets things apart, and secures them from vitious intromission; so goods are sealed, that they may be secured to the lawful owner: Thus the Spirit, by the word sent home on the hearts of believers, seals them to the day of redemption, Eph. iv. 30.; they are, as it were, marked and set aside for the Lord's use, and to be possessors of the heavenly inheritance.

5. Sealing is for confirming, Jer. xxxiii. 10, 11. *I subscribed the evidence, and sealed it*: So this sealing of the law on the hearts of disciples, when the Spirit graciously shines upon his own work in them and discovers it to them, confirms them as to their interest in the heavenly inheritance; for thus the Spirit brings them to the sensible assurance of salvation, Eph. i. 13. *After that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy spirit of promise.*

3dly, The law may be said to be sealed among Christ's disciples, when, as the fruit of its being thus powerfully applied to their souls, they are brought to seal it dutifully. Their sealing it indeed does not add any thing to its intrinsic worth or certainty; yet the Lord may be said to seal the law among them, in leading them out to put their seal to it: And this may be done  
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various ways. We shall not insist on their sealing it in a way of believing it, which is to set to the seal that God is true; of which before: and indeed, without this, all their sealing of it otherways will be vain, as to any saving benefit to themselves, or gracious acceptance with God; for without faith it is impossible to please God. But here,

1. They are to set to their seal, by an open faithful profession and confession of Christ and his truths. It is a law of the God of Zion, *Zion thy God confess*: The hundred and forty four thousand with the Lamb on mount Zion, had his *Father's name written in their foreheads*, Rev. xiv. 1. Every one in their station, ministers and other office-bearers of the church in their station, and private Christians in theirs,—are to make this open and full profession of Christ's truths; and give in their testimony, as his witnesses, in opposition to all gainfayers. *Ye are my witnesses, saith the Lord, that I am God*, Isa. xlii. 12. Men may talk of it as they will, as a matter of indifferency what be mens profession; if they be good Christians, as they say: But we are sure, that there is no such doctrine taught in the law and testimony. A holy profession is enjoined, as well as a holy conversation; and corruption in principle, is found to introduce corruption in practice. Whether they deserve the name of good Christians who can speak lightly of any of the truths of Christ, or at least whether in so doing they are acting as such,—let the law and the testimony judge. But,

2. They are to set to their seal by a holy conversation, confirming the genuineness of their profession. To keep the garments clean, to have a well ordered conversation, a conversation that manifests a regard to both tables of the law, and wherein every duty has a place, and its own proper place,—adorns the doctrine of God our Saviour, and proves sealing and confirming to others about them; yea, sometimes winning to their  
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3. They may be called to seal it with their oath. It is usual enough among men, as to matters of weight, particularly when they become matters of controversy, for witnesses to seal their testimony with an oath; *and an oath for confirmation, is an end of all strife,* Heb. vi. 6, 16. And not only are Christ's disciples called to seal his testimony and law in partaking of baptism and the Lord's supper, the seals of the covenant of grace under the New Testament, which imply a solemn oath; but they may be called, upon proper occasions, to a formal and explicit avouching of the Lord to be their God, and devoting of themselves to him to be his people,—swearing by the great name of the Lord, that they approve of, and through grace will adhere to his truths and cause. There are many promises in the Old Testament, as Isaiah xix. 18, 21. xlv. 3, 5. xlv. 23. &c. which undoubtedly look to New Testament times; and point this forth as a duty, in these days to be practised. They cannot be understood only of the solemn profession that is made in the receiving of baptism and the Lord's supper: For though no doubt an oath is implied in these, yet the expressions *they shall swear to the Lord of Hosts, shall vow a vow to the Lord, one shall say I am the Lord's, another shall subscribe with his hand to the Lord,* &c. must refer to a formal explicit swearing by the great name of the Lord; or else we may wrest the scripture to any meaning we please. No words can be conceived more plain and express to the purpose, than those of the prophet. Besides, the Old Testament-church had seals of the same covenant of grace, for substance the same with those under the New; yet to these they were called, on certain occasions,  
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to superadd this solemn act of express swearing. Why then should it be pled, that no more is intended by these expressions, as they refer to New Testament-days, than a profession of Christ and submitting to his ordinances, particularly a partaking of the seals of the covenant; seeing it is evident, that these expressions meant something further in the days of the prophets? Neither can it be said with any reason, that these are only promises of New Testament worship in the Old Testament stile, and so not literally to be understood of religious swearing. For though we grant that such promises are to be found in the Old Testament, as in Isa. xix. 19, 21. there is a promise of an *altar* and a *sacrifice*; yet the scripture plainly shews us what was typified and prefigured by these, and so affords us an explication of such promises: But what was the anti-type of religious swearing, we suppose the adversaries of this work themselves cannot shew. Besides, this duty is not any way ceremonial, but moral in its nature; and moral duties are binding under every dispensation. It is required in the first and third commandments, as they are well explained in our Larger Catechism: and it is strange that any who profess an adherence to our excellent standards, should stand on the other side.

There are not wanting arguments from the New Testament also, particularly, we may argue from 2 Cor. viii. 5. This place cannot be understood merely of a professed subjection to Christ, in submitting to the ordinances of word and sacraments; for this could be no more than the apostles expected from a church: *But this they did not as we hoped, (says he) but first gave their own selves to the Lord.* Nor can it be meant only of devoting a part of their substance to the use of the poor saints; for this is otherways expressly spoken of in the context: and here, the manner in which they proceeded is set forth; first in order dedicating themselves to the Lord, and then their substance. Here surely

surely is covenanting, as to the matter of it; and as to the manner of it likewise, in swearing by the name of the Lord. It is strange, that such as allow the warrantableness of an oath under the New Testament, in a matter of weight and controversy, and that it is a solemn act of religious worship; should deny it to be warrantable in a matter of such weight as God's eternal truth, and where the controversy is between God and Baal. There being no express precept for it in so many words in the New Testament, will never conclude against a moral duty; while the whole testimony and law is the rule of our faith and practice: and God has seen meet, for holy ends, thus to leave occasion to men of corrupt minds to pervert the truth. But by the same argument, other doctrines of our holy religion, which the opposers of this profess adherence to, would fall to the ground. Much more might be said on this subject; but it would not be proper to insist further on the present occasion.

4. Ministers are to set to their seal to the law, by doctrinally giving in their testimony to all the points and articles of it; keeping nothing back of the counsel of God: and church judicatures, judicially testifying against errors and immoralities, asserting the truths of Christ, especially when controverted and oppos'd, and censuring the erroneous and scandalous,---are to set to their seal to this law, like Christ's disciples.

5. Disciples may be called to seal it with their blood, by suffering for the cause of Christ. We have not yet resisted unto blood; but thus has a testimony for the truths of Christ been handed down to us in these lands, a testimony for a covenanted work of reformation, which calls for our notice. For though indeed it is not mens testimony that we are to found our faith upon, it must not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God; yet no opinion should be embraced, unless clearly made out from the word of God,  
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that imports that our worthy forefathers, who had evidently such a share of the divine countenance in their sufferings, died as fools die: and I am sure that this is the plain import of the Latitudinarian principles which are abounding among professors at this day. We proceed to observe,

4thly, The law may be said to be sealed among Christ's disciples, when the Lord preserves it among them, and keeps it pure, in spite of all efforts from Satan; from vile heretics and wicked persecutors, his agents and instruments. He has committed it as a sacred depositum to the church; and there is a remarkable hand of providence to be seen in preserving it in the church, and handing it down pure from one generation to another. For it is *written for the generation to come, and the people which shall be created, shall praise the Lord*, Psal. cii. 18.

5thly, and lastly; This sealing of the law which we have been speaking of in the preceding particulars, is brought about by the ministry of Christ's servants; hence he says to them, *Seal the law among my disciples*.

1. This is the mean of begetting faith in the heart; hence the gospel is called the *word of faith which we preach*: and the apostle says, *Faith cometh by hearing*.

2. It is the instrument of regeneration and sanctification, Jam. i. 18. John xvii. 17. It is by this that the law is written on their hearts; and the image of God stamped upon them, as an instrument in the hand of the divine Spirit. 3. And so it is the mean of bringing, through the Lord's blessing, to the profession and obedience of this testimony and law, from the faith of it in the heart, Rom. x. 9, 10, 17. compared. 4. This ministry is the mean of preserving the doctrines of Christ from being perverted, while they are doctrinally and judicially declared and defended. But our time does not allow us to enlarge on these things: we therefore proceed,

IV. To

IV. To make some short improvement of what has been said ; which may be done, in addressing ourselves to some sorts of persons.

1st, There is here a foundation for addressing the ministers of Christ, to whom this text particularly looks; *Bind up the testimony, seal the law among my disciples.* Let me use the freedom then, to direct myself to my Brethren in the ministry in a few words; desiring to take the same exhortations to myself.

#### FATHERS and BRETHREN,

We are placed in a very high and eminent station; being the heralds of the King of Zion, ambassadors for God. We are called to a very weighty, tho' honourable work; to publish God's law and testimony. The issue of our labours, while helped to a faithful discharge of our trust, is very important and momentous ; while they must prove either the favour of life unto life, or of death unto death, to those we minister among,—either a binding up the testimony from them, or a sealing the law among them. In our place and calling, we are exposed to various snares and temptations; from the frowns and flatteries of Satan and the world without, and from the deceitful workings of unbelief and other corruptions within. Let us then be concerned,

1. To make sure of being Christ's disciples ourselves; and to have experience of this testimony and law being sealed home upon our own hearts, while we declare it to others. Tho' one in a state of nature may be called to the work of the ministry, yet it is a most heartless thing to preach an unknown Christ. It is an awful issue, for such as preach Christ to others, to be cast away themselves. A master in Israel ignorant of the new birth, a man of God without God in the world, a minister of Christ in league with Satan,---is a shocking absurdity. Graceless ministers are not likely to be instruments of doing much good to souls, whatever the Lord may do

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in a way of sovereignty. It is good when ministers can say, *that which we have seen and heard declare we unto you*; and these things write we, speak we unto you, *that ye may have fellowship with us, and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ.*

2. Let us be concerned to be well acquainted with, and to study much this testimony and law; the scriptures of truth, and the truths therein contain'd. It was the commendation of Apollos (Acts xviii. 24.) that he was *mighty in the scriptures*; and of Timothy, that *from a child he had known the holy scriptures.* There are other branches of knowledge that are useful, and in their own place necessary; but it is in this respect they are so, as they conduce to our further acquaintance with this testimony and law: and therefore, the volume of God's book is to be our chief study. The command looks to us in a particular manner, *Search the scriptures, for they are they which testify of me.*

3. Let us study, through grace, a faithful discharge of our trust; to fulfill our ministry, which we have received of the Lord. Let us doctrinally declare all God's testimony and law; keeping back nothing to gain mens favour, or for fear of their displeasure. Our commission is to teach them *to observe all things whatsoever Christ has commanded us.* Paul could say, *I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God.* And if we seek to please men, we are not the servants of Christ. Particularly we are, in this respect, faithfully to testify against present errors and defections; and appear for whatever is the present truth, the word of Christ's patience: And as watchmen to sound an alarm to our people; when we see danger approaching, error and defection creeping in, or judgments impending. *For if the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself to the battle?* We are also to deliver our message with plainness and simplicity, not using the enticing words of man's wisdom; or  
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seeking to distinguish ourselves by politeness of stile and expression, or by adorning the truths of Christ with human oratory. The simplicity of the gospel is its beauty: and to depart from the scripture stile, or to seek to adorn gospel truths by human art, proves, instead of adorning, to be a marring of their beauty; it is like gilding a diamond, or wrapping a cloth about the edge of a sword,---which spoils the lustre of the one, and blunts the edge of the other. And judiciously, we must be concerned faithfully to condemn error and defection, to assert the truth, and to censure the erroneous and scandalous: and in all to act so, as it may be said to each in the issue,---*Well done, thou good and faithful servant.*

4. In all this, we should be concerned to have a single eye to the glory of God and the good of souls. Ministers, above all, should have the eye single. To them to live should be Christ, and his increasing, the fulfilling of their joy. And they are to travail as in birth till Christ be formed in souls; and to count all their pains and toil well bestowed, if they be instrumental of but gaining one soul to Christ.

5. Let us have our eye to the Lord himself, for success in our ministrations. Paul may plant and Apollos water, but it is *God that giveth the increase*. The weapons of our warfare are mighty through God. His blessing can make weak means effectual, for accomplishing great ends. By faith the walls of Jericho fell down, at the blowing of rams horns. We are but as tools, and can do nothing but as employed by the great and skilful worker.

6. As to the melancholy issue of our labours with many, in binding up the testimony, and their proving the favour of death unto death; let us, after Christ's example, adore divine sovereignty, Mat. xi. 25. and let us be deeply affected with the ruin of immortal souls, and

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at the same time rejoice that God shall be glorified; for we are unto God a sweet savour of Christ in them that are saved, and in them that perish.

7. Let us depend on the Lord, for strength to carry us through in our work and warfare: he sends none out on their own charges. He backs our commission with, --- *Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world, Amen.* Be strong, says he, and work; for *I am with you, saith the Lord of hosts.* When he sends us forth then with such a commission, --- *Bind up the testimony, seal the law among my disciples;* let our answer be, --- *We will go in the strength of the Lord God, we will make mention of thy righteousness, even of thine only.*

2dly, We may direct ourselves to such as have not the saving knowledge of this testimony and law.

1. Consider what a melancholy state and condition ye are in; ye are in darkness, under the power of spiritual blindness, under the power of Satan the prince of darkness; without Christ, without God, without hope in the world.

2. Consider that, while the gospel proves not the mean of enlightening and renewing you, you will be the more blinded and hardened under it. It will not return empty; but either tend to your salvation, or greater condemnation.

3. Consider that by and by, if mercy prevent not, — these things which belong to your peace will be hid from your eyes, Luke xix. 42. They may come to be so, through the Lord's depriving you of the gospel; removing the candlestick out of its place, as he did with the Jews: or through the Lord's judicially giving you up to blindness and hardness of heart; saying, My spirit shall no more strive with that man; saying to conscience, to ordinances, and providences, Let him alone; saying to ministers, *Bind up the testimony,* — shut his eyes, make his heart fat: and this is a more awful

ful judgment on a person or people, than sword,—famine or pestilence. And they may be hid by death; after which there is no place for repentance, though one sought it carefully with tears. Therefore,

4. Be concerned to improve the day of your merciful visitation; and to cry to God, through Christ,—that he may lighten your eyes, lest you sleep the sleep of death; that he may open your eyes, to see wonders out of his law: to which the promise may encourage you,—*In that day the eyes of the blind shall see out of obscurity, and out of darkness,*

3dly, We may direct ourselves to such as have the law sealed upon them and among them, as Christ's disciples.

1. Adore the freedom and sovereignty of God's grace, who has so singled you out; and give him all the glory. It is by the grace of God you are what you are.

2. Cleave to the Lord with purpose of heart; and beware of barring out light, as to any part of the Lord's cause and testimony. This dishonours the Lord, and provokes him to hide these things from you;—and so to deny you the honour of faithfully appearing for him, in a perverse and crooked generation; and may bring upon you heavy fatherly strokes. For though he pardon his people, he will take vengeance on their inventions.

3. Walk as them that are so highly privileged; *let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ.*

4. Brethren pray for us, and the success of our ministry.

5. Pity them from whom the *testimony* is bound up, and the *law sealed*. This certainly becomes disciples.

4thly, We exhort all in general,

1. To prize a gospel dispensation; it is the ministration of righteousness for the justification, and the ministration of the Spirit for the sanctification of sinners. It is  
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a light shining in a dark place, it is the word of life; it ought therefore to be much prized.

2. To improve it,—while it is said, *to day if ye will hear his voice.* The improvement of it, by faith's closing with Christ for salvation, is the best way to manifest that we prize this our privilege.

3. To examine and try what effect the gospel has upon you; whether it be turning out, through the Lord's blessing, to your spiritual benefit: or if, in a way of righteous judgment, it be tending to your hurt; so as to be likely to turn out in the issue, to your greater condemnation. For it will prove to be a certain truth, and it is the sum of all we have been saying,—that both mercy and judgment are displayed, in the effects of a gospel ministry; and either the one or the other will be made manifest, in the effect it comes to have upon every one under such a dispensation: seeing it is said by Christ, to those whom he sends forth to labour in his vineyard,—*Bind up the testimony, seal the law among my disciples.*

F I N I S.



